

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1296

**“AN ACT TO REPEAL AUTHORIZATION FOR SMELT FISHING IN MUD BROOK
IN AROOSTOOK COUNTY”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative McELWEE of CARIBOU

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator EDGECOMB of AROOSTOOK
Representative EDGECOMB of FORT FAIRFIELD
Representative FREDETTE of NEWPORT
Representative KINNEY of KNOX
Representative LONG of SHERMAN
Representative MARTIN of SINCLAIR
Representative WALLACE of DEXTER
Representative WHITE of WASHBURN

DATE OF HEARING: April 23, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. My name is Michael Brown, Fisheries Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 1296**.

This bill repeals the provision that authorizes smelting in Mud Brook. Currently a person may fish for smelt by use of a dip net in Mud Brook, in Aroostook County.

The Department recognizes the importance of the recreational smelt fishery to the people in the Aroostook region and the strong tradition associated with spring smelt dipping. In recognition of this tradition and the desire for these opportunities, the Department strives to retain recreational hook and line and spring dip net fisheries for smelts in as many waters as possible.

In 2001, with significant input from the public, the Department developed a state-wide management plan for rainbow smelt. The plan addresses the complexity, competing uses, and allocation of smelts among user groups. The plan clearly establishes that the highest priority for allocation of smelts is for forage in support of coldwater gamefishes, particularly for landlocked salmon. The plan further recognizes that providing

recreational anglers with smelt fishing opportunities is the second highest priority for allocating the smelt resource.

Our support for L.D. 1296 is a result of the declines we have observed in the Long Lake salmon fishery since 2007. We have made observations of the smelt run at Mud Brook and over time these observations provide compelling evidence of a depressed smelt run at Mud Brook, once the largest run for the lake and the primary spawning tributary for this important forage fish. It is important to note that smelt are still present in the lake and are being caught in the hook and line fishery, but the production of young-of-the-year and age-1 smelt has been greatly compromised and continues to negatively affect the excellent salmon growth that had been observed for many years in Long Lake.

Since 2007, when Mud Brook was opened to smelt dipping, there has been a steady decline in the size of 3-year old salmon, even though we have recently reduced the stocking rate. Without a healthy smelt population available to support the landlocked salmon population, anglers can expect to see below average salmon growth for the foreseeable future, reductions in the average size of salmon, fewer large salmon available to anglers, and a return to the unsatisfactory size quality experienced in the 1990's.

If the smelt population continues to decline, the Department will have to further reduce the stocking rate to balance the number of salmon with the remaining smelt population. Adjusting the stocking rate is one of the very few management options available to achieve the predator- prey balance needed to grow the very large, high quality landlocked salmon that Long Lake has long been noted for, and which attract anglers from across Maine and New England to northern Aroostook County.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.